Famous Gambler and Gun Man

George Wingfield, Nevada's New Senator, Has Had a Remarkable Career.

That very dignified, somewhat sleepy and altogether respectable body, the Senate of the United States, has a new member who will add much to its picturesqueness. He is George Wingfield, gambler and "gun man," who has been appointed from Nevada by Governor Oddie to fill out the unexpired term of the late Senator Nixon. The other senator from Nevada is F. G. Newlands, of Reno, who is a graduate of Yale, says the New York Press.

Wingfield is the leading gambler of the West. He is the owner of the Tonopah club, where the biggest of all the Nevada tigers has its lair. The "tiger" attains its largest growth in Nevada just at present. Wingfield is the pale iron-nerved type of man that once used to be common on the Mississippi river steamboats and in the dealer's chair of western faro banks, but which now is fast disappearing. Though his reputation as a "gun man" extends to the furthest frontiers, he is said never to seek a quarrel. When one is thrust upon him, however, none has ever been quicker on the trigger than he. With the legal weapons used in the games of high finance he is reputed to be equally swift and sure. He is 36 years old, and his fortune is estimated at all the way from $12,000,000 to three times that amount.

It is no especial wonder that Wingfield was appointed to succeed Nixon. He and Nixon were partners for years in various enterprises, and each amassed much wealth. Together they practically controlled the politics of Nevada. Up to not long ago gambling was a recognized and perfectly legal business or industry in Nevada. It was protected by law. It no longer is legalized, but it goes on just as of old. Out in Nevada it is not considered anything against a man to gamble or even to own a gambling house or to conduct one.

Senator Wingfield is interested in mining also and in a number of other things that bring him in considerable wealth. The Tonopah club is said to yield him an annual income of some $200,000. How much he derives from his other enterprises is not known. No one even hazards a guess at the amount, and Wingfield, one of the most secretive of men, never has given a hint.

The rise of George Wingfield from an impecunious cowboy gambler to the Senate of the United States is remarkable in its swiftness. There are various versions as to how he got his start. The most widely accepted story and one which Wingfield never has denied, is that he blew into Tonopah in 1901 with $150 which he had borrowed from Nixon, the man he succeeds in the Senate. In fact, from that day until the time of Nixon's death recently, the careers of the two men ran along the same channel. Wingfield was born, some say, in Arkansas, others Oregon, and still others New Mexico. Until Senator Wingfield's official biography is printed in the blue book of Congress no one will be able to say what State is entitled to the honor. As a youngster he became a cow puncher and later landed at Golconda, a mining camp near Winnemucca, Nev. There he became acquainted with Nixon, who, until his election as senator in 1904, was president of a bank at Winnemucca, a way station on the Southern Pacific. Nixon was also the "State agent" for that railway. At Golconda and at Winnemucca Wingfield bet on the cards in the faro banks consistently and carefully, but with varying fortunes, for then, as now and as always, a square game is merely tradition. He did a little cow punching and a little mining, but mostly he was a gambling house hanger-on. Poker, faro and keno had equal charms for Wingfield. Finally he went flat broke and got the historic $150 stake from Nixon. Wingfield had heard that the game at Tonopah was "easy" and decided to go thither and test it.

Wingfield found Tonopah "easier" than he expected. He had a great run of luck and pyramided and parlayed his winnings until they reached several thousands of dollars. Then, after he had repaid his $150 Nixon loan, he determined to quit bucking faro from the player's side of the table, so he started the Tonopah club. He had a partner in this, but it was not long until Wingfield's share as principal owner in the enterprise was valued at more than $1,000,000.

Up to 1906 Wingfield was not regarded as being anything more than a "boss" gambler. He attended strictly to his business at the Tonopah club and made money hand over fist. There was plenty of money in circulation. The mines in that now famous district were yielding up their treasures at the rate of more than $1,000,000 a month. Goldfield had a population of 15,000. The town's bank deposits totaled $15,000,000. Real estate on the main street was held at $1,000 a front foot. Every one had money. There were plenty of saloons and gambling houses. Not many years before men had died of thirst in the desert which was there. Wingfield was making big money at Tonopah, but he saw in Goldfield a chance to make more. What gave him the idea was another lucky stroke of fortune.

One night a Mr. Elliott, who had "cleaned up" in Bullfrog and who had become a partner in a mine promoting firm at Goldfield was at the Tonopah club. Elliott was a plunger, and that night he dropped $20,000 at Wingfield's place. When asked to settle he tendered a check for $5,000 and a certificate for 100,000 shares of Goldfield Laguna Mining company stock, which was then selling at 15 cents. This was accepted. Wingfield began to take an interest in mining stocks from that time forth. In a short time Laguna was selling freely at $2 a share.

Incidentally, every one who worked at the Tonopah club got to making money in mining shares. Wingfield was the Andrew Carnegie of Nevada. All his "young men" prospered. One of his faro dealers promoted Goldfield Daisy, which ballooned up to a $6 share on a capitalization of 1,500,000 shares. At the market price in those days the mine was worth $9,000,000, but it never earned a dollar for its stockholders.

That sort of thing made Wingfield keener than ever. He and Nixon drew closer together. They made some profitable deals in mining properties and then they formed a pool and acquired ownership of control of the merged $36,000,000 Goldfield Consolidated, which was their corporate creation.

After that Winfield's connection with the Tonopah club did not take much of his time. He was in the thick of things at Goldfield, and was reputed to be the power behind the market in mining stocks. Once Nixon had been the bigger man; now Wingfield was regarded as the chief, and Nixon only a circumstance in the partnership. Wingfield belonged to the Goldfield stock exchange and was an active and conspicuous member. Even out on the curb, where there was buying and selling far into the night, he always was in the thick of the fray. What he said—and he said little—was telegraphed to the mining stock markets of the East as authoritative opinion. The leading citizens of the place used to congregate at the Montezuma club, and there Wingfield would remark cautiously that such and such a stock would sell at $20 before it would sell at $10. The New York curb market would have the news by the time it opened, and the Goldfield stock exchange would have a lot of fresh buying orders from the public by the time it began business next morning, always at higher prices. Those were golden days.

Wingfield just had turned his thirieth year then. He is described by one who knew him well as being of meager frame. His face showed an extreme pallor that might have come from ill health, years of hardship or careless habits. This was all the more striking because nearly every one in Goldfield or Reno or Tonopah or anywhere else in Nevada is deeply sunburned. Only the dealers and lookouts in the gambling houses are untanned, even by the suns of other years. Wingfield's gaze never was steady. It continually shifted to and fro, perhaps a matter of habit. A man who deals or works as lookout in a gambling house has to keep a swiftly shifting eye on every part of the board. Wingfield was cold of manner and taciturn of disposition. He was noted for his secretiveness. He was rated as a cool, calculating, selfish, sure-thing man—a gambler who had turned man of affairs. He was infinitely patient in waiting for things to come his way, at the same time accelerating them as quietly and safely as he could. But, master of the mining stock market and boss gambler that he was, he found his sole relaxation at playing stud poker. In this, the stiffest of all games to play, he was a consistent winner. He was famed all over Nevada for the half-cunning expression he was wont to assume, which deceived his opponents into believing he was bluffing when he wasn't. Many tried to imitate him in this respect, but failed. There was only one Wingfield. Like Napoleon, he was unique.

As the years went on Wingfield and Nixon tightened their hold on the mines and the banks of Nevada. Nixon was below middle height, rather inclined to stoutness, but very dapper. His steel-gray eyes were absolutely without expression, but he was a kindly, companionable man compared to Wingfield. Wingfield gathered a newspaper or so into his net. Usually he had to take them on foreclosure proceedings, for he was a patron of literature when it came to lending money to a Nevada newspaper, although he was inexorable about claiming what was due him when the term of the loan expired.

In those days, about six years ago, when everything and everyone was riding on the top wave of prosperity, the Democrats were victorious in the State election. Sparks was elected governor and Denver S. Dickerson, the candidate of the labor unions, lieutenant governor. Some time before that Dickerson had been confined in the "bull pen" at Cripple Creek, when the government had intervened to quell the labor riots there. Not long after that a labor war threatened Goldfield. A few of the "wise ones" saw it coming, and sold out their holdings at top prices. They made millions. They rather liked the idea of a labor war, so they could buy back their stocks at bankrupt sale prices. It was then that Wingfield practically broke the back of the labor revolution that threatened in Nevada. It was then also that he proved that he was a man of the coldest daring.

Goldfield was in the power of the Western Federation of Miners. The miners' federation and the "high graders" had the situation, they thought, by the throat and were dictating their own terms. Even the newsboys on the streets were forbidden to sell papers that said anything against the miners. Every form of industry was flocking to the side of the miners. The whole country was terrorized by them. At this juncture Wingfield let it be known that unless the miners "shut up" and crawled into their holes he not only would shut down all the mines in Goldfield and Tonopah and Bull Frog and the other big camps, but when he had starved the miners back to work they would have to resume at reduced wages. The miners were aroused to a fighting pitch by the pronouncements. Then, when everything was at the point of its greatest tension, Wingfield sauntered up and down the main street of Goldfield. He let it be known that he was armed to the teeth and that he dared any miner to "get him." He showed himself ostentatiously, contemptuously. He told the newsboys to sell what they pleased; that he would kill the first man who raised a finger against them or any one else who was his friend. Wingfield was the coolest man in camp. Pale-faced, anemic, ill-looking, this one man defied the whole miners' federation, and not one man dared even look askance at him.

Wingfield's reception as a "gun man" seems to have been well deserved. It is reported that he "went mad" when he was fifteen. Whether the tales about his personal encounters and the many notches on his gun are true or not, two things are indisputable. One is that in every gambling house he ever has had anything to do with the most perfect order has been maintained. They have been much less noisy than the United States Senate. The other is the contemptuous courage that he showed at Goldfield in those days of the labor war.

The Tonopah Club is a rather handsome and imposing gambling house even for the Far West, where such things flourish. In elegance, of course, it could not be compared to Canfield's or some of the other noted places that New York has known, but in size and quality of its play even New York has nothing on it. The usual Nevada gambling house is a very business-like place. In Reno the principal games are on the street along which the railroad track runs. They are on the ground floor. The rooms are about twenty feet wide and perhaps $100 feet deep. The floor is bare and covered with dust. The places run night and day, and the men employed there work in three shifts of eight hours each. Every house has an automatic piano and one place has a set of painted studies in the nude, which local legends say cost $30,000. Those are the only aesthetic appeals in any of the gambling houses. There are no chairs except for the faro and stud poker players. One house has a racing board and another a keno game. Crap and twenty-one are also played. Everything is as quiet as a grocery store on a Saturday night, and much busier.

JUDGE WAS NOT FROM MISSOURI

Screen Door and Hat Pin Features In Court

COURT EMBARRASSED

Negress Wants to Exhibit Wound As Evidence Which is Source of Much Amusement to Spectators, But Annoyance to Judge.

By GEORGE A. ROSS.

The row all started over a screen door, but a hatpin seemed to have been the leading feature of the evidence in a case in the Memphis City court yesterday afternoon, when Becky Harris and Nancy Goldsby, negro women from St. Paul avenue, were arraigned on charges of assault and battery.

"Nancy claims, your honor," said Patrolman Jamison, "that Becky raked her across the breast with a knife. I could not get much out of the trouble so I just sent them both in."

"What about it, Nancy?" asked Judge Bacon, who presided at the session.

"Yassah, jedge, dat's right, she cut me, right heah cross de breast."

"What did she cut you with, a knife or razor?" asked the judge.

"I doan know what it was, jedge, but she sho' cut me."

"Did she hurt you much," asked the court.

"She sho' did, jedge! lemme sho' yo' de place."

"Never mind that; I don't care to see the wound."

"I nevah hurts hur er bit, jedge," broke in Becky, who was black and impatient, "it wan't nuthin' but er pin scratch."

"She did cut me, jedge. I gwine ter sho' yo' dis time."

"Wait a minute, never mind about showing me, I understand."

"Tain't nuthin' but er pin scratch," said Becky.

"It am wus'n dat, jedge, I wish yo" let me show you."

"I am not from Missouri. What was all this row about, anyhow?" asked the judge.

"'Bout nuthin' but er screen do', dat's all, jedge," said Becky. "I jes' leaned 'ginst de do' an' she 'lowed I let in mo' flies dan my company worth. Den I 'lowed dat de do' wan't so mighty much. Den she say she paid fo' de do' accordin' to de new ordinance an' dat no niggah gwine ter lean 'ginst it."

"Jedge, look lack she jes' tryin' ter let in flies or break dat do' down," declared Nancy.

"We got into er squabble, jedge, an' she got a lil' scratch wid mah hatpin," declared Becky.

"Tain't no lil' scratch, nuther," declared Nancy. "Jedge, I jes' boun' ter sho' yo' dat place. Dis niggah keeps makin' me out de liah."

"Wait a minute," shouted the judge at Nancy, who was opening her bosom; "I am going to settle this case right now. I fail to see much in it."

"Dat's kase yo' won't let me sho' yo' jedge," broke in Nancy, fumbling the bosom of her dress.

"I will fine you Nancy, if you say another word," declared the judge.

"I nevah lied erbout it, jedge, she not hurt," said Becky.

"Silence! The next one of you that speaks I will send to the workhouse for six months. As I said, there is not much in this case—except the disposition to treat a screen door with disrespect. If there is anything these flytime days that is entitled to the utmost consideration, it is the fly screen. Go on home, now, both of you, and keep that screen door closed and that hatpin in your hat."

As they "filed" out for the liberty gate, Nancy looked at the judge in a sort of puzzled sort of way, and fumbled the bosom of her dress again.

"I sho' dat niggah lyin' ef dat jedge jes' let me sho' him, deed I would," she said as she left the court room.